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Mapping Journalistic Role Performance Across Five Arab Countries

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Abstract

This study applies a media systems approach to examine the performance of journalistic roles in the news of five Arab countries: Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The content analysis of 13,299 news stories in newspapers, radio, television, and online sites revealed the practice of loyal-facilitator, watchdog, interventionist, service, civic, and infotainment roles is a result of the intersection of several factors. Overall, findings point to the overarching power of the political system that is manifested in media ownership, media political alignment, and countries' specific conditions.

Research on media systems in Western contexts has consistently revealed the existence of a direct link between the political system and specific journalistic practices in a country (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2012; Siebert et al., 1956). The Arab region is no different. The geographic area that extends from the Arabian Peninsula on the Indian Ocean to the western shores of North Africa, however, embraces various types of political systems that range from hereditary monarchies to parliamentary republics and everything in between. Accordingly, the laws that govern each country and its media vary across systems, and the practice of journalism fluctuates as a reflection of

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the political powers in place. Such oscillations are common in Lebanon where enacting a law depends on who is in charge and who is at fault (El-Richani, 2016) and in Egypt that witnessed various changes in media freedoms with the changes in government (Khamis, 2011). Although the media's values align completely with those of the government in many of the Gulf states, such as the UAE and Qatar, hawkishness characterizes the journalistic stance toward those in power in other parts of the region, as is the case in Lebanon (Rugh, 2004). Considering media liberalization in Arab countries has translated into differences in both media infrastructure and news content, it is inconceivable "to write about 'the Arab media' as if they share the same policies" (Najjar, 2004, p. 256). Thus, from a practical standpoint, understanding journalistic cultures in the region calls for an assessment of the role performance that journalists exercise on a daily basis. Journalistic cultures represent the cultural capital that journalists share, and which appears in the norms and ideals of journalists, and their professional performance (Zelizer, 1993). Since journalism is decisive in the exercise of power in modern societies, and the way that journalists inform the stories they cover has a profound impact on shaping public and private debates, it is therefore important to know to what extent specific journalistic role conceptions manifest themselves in the news (Mellado, 2021).

This study attempts to map journalistic role performance in the Arab region through the larger umbrella of media systems research, focusing on country media systems as an entry point. In particular, the content analysis of 13,299 news stories representing 49 print, broadcast, and online media outlets in five Arab countries from the Levant (Lebanon), the Gulf (Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates), and North Africa (Egypt) examines the relationship between six journalistic roles—interventionist, loyal, watchdog, service, civic, and infotainment (Mellado, 2021)—and the organizational level factors of media ownership, platform type, and political alignment. The significance of this study lies in leading empirical research on this topic in the Arab region amid extant theorizations of the politics–media complex, country media systems, and journalistic cultures that remain conceptual in nature in the Arab world (Richter & Kozman, 2021; Rugh, 2004).

Literature Review

Journalistic Role Performance

The performative level of professional roles is the level most likely to be observed by the public and different reference groups through the outcome of newsroom decisions translated into news stories. Christians et al. (2009) theorized media/journalistic functions in terms of the monitorial (objective watchdog; part of the structures of power), facilitative (independent from power structures; facilitates political participation of citizens), radical (oppositional; challenges positions of power), and collaborative roles (protects the interests of the powerful). Mellado and colleagues operationalized role performance in the news based on three interrelated domains: power relations, audience approach, and journalistic voice. Within each domain, the practice of journalism

can be measured in the news by independent indicators that resemble specific reporting styles and practices, which relate to different expectations of journalism in different organizational and societal contexts (Mellado & van Dalen, 2017; Mellado & Vos, 2017).

In this conceptualization of journalistic role performance, the power relations domain deals with the relationship between journalists and those in power, where journalists may see themselves as watchdogs, monitoring the powerful and denouncing wrongdoing. At the same time, journalists can see their primary function as loyal facilitators, by portraying political elites and their policies in a good light or focus on the nation state by placing emphasis on national triumphs and prestige. The audience approach domain deals with the way in which journalists address the audience: as citizens, clients, or spectators. These different understandings of the audience can be associated with three independent dimensions of professional roles: the civic, the service, and the infotainment roles, respectively. Finally, the journalistic voice domain deals with the presence of journalists' voice in the news, involving the role of the journalist as interventionist versus disseminator.

The existence of multiple roles partly reflects the institutional context within which journalists work, which often means several roles overlap when writing a single story (Humanes et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2018). As roles are context-specific and not fixed, journalists combine them in various ways when they produce the news (Mellado, 2021). The overlap in journalistic roles is also a byproduct of audiences' many roles in society, which prompt journalists to take them into account when they produce the news across newsbeats, platforms, and contexts (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). From a sociology perspective, such coexistence of roles is the norm in any profession whose members continuously respond to various demands that allow them to perform their professional duties across these roles (Weick, 1996).

Using this framework, several studies have analyzed journalistic role performance in different societal and organizational environments (e.g., Humanes & Roses, 2018; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Mellado et al., 2023; Stępińska et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2023). Existing research on role performance across the globe has found a link between roles and media systems but has simultaneously rejected the concept of a uniform, ideal media system, replacing it with the hybridization thesis that refers to the presence of layers of journalistic roles that challenge normative models (Mellado et al., 2017). For instance, the media's watchdog function that has been traditionally linked to advanced democracies in theory and in practice (Humanes et al., 2021; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020) was also the most prevalent in countries whose media system is characterized by political parallelism, namely Poland (Stępińska et al., 2016), Greece, and Spain (Humanes & Roses, 2018; Mellado et al., 2017). Advanced democracies in the West were also found to practice civic-advocate roles, alongside the watchdog role, pointing to the co-occurrence of professional roles in the news (Humanes et al., 2021). Unexpectedly perhaps, journalists in liberal media systems, such as the United States and northern Europe, seemed to play an interventionist role during political turmoil even when they exercised their watchdog function in other times (Mellado et al., 2017). Although evidence from 18 countries in five regions

reveals journalists in advanced democracies play the detached watchdog function more than their colleagues in some transitional and non-democratic countries (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020), non-democratic countries and transitional democracies share some roles with advanced democracies (Mellado et al., 2017). One example comes from China, where even in the tightly controlled Chinese media landscape, newspapers displayed some indicators of the watchdog role and only few of the loyal-facilitator role (Wang et al., 2018). Regardless of the democracy type or the media system, nuances in each country denote the importance of considering various contextual factors when examining professional roles (Humanes & Roses, 2018; Wang et al., 2017).

Arab Media Systems and Journalistic Roles

An assessment of contextual factors in Arab media involves an understanding of the political systems that vary widely across countries due to the diverse trajectories that have characterized Arab states, giving way to a variety of political and economic structures, and disparities in media development and infrastructure (Mellor, 2023). The heterogeneity of the Arab region is first observed in the political systems that comprise various models, ranging from republics to emirates with many variations in between. Second, the region encompasses different media systems that include loyalist and diverse systems with distinct manifestations of journalistic roles. Although the media in these countries behave differently according to the political system in place, they share the aspect of political parallelism (Ayish, 2002; Blum, 2014; Richter & Kozman, 2021; Rugh, 2004). Broadly defined as the degree to which the media align themselves to the views of political authorities in a country (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), political parallelism is high in the Arab region due to a mix of loyalty and political ownership, on one hand, and commercial interests that weigh heavier than political interests, on the other (Kraidy, 2009). The interplay between political and economic interests and media is evident in how national security interests and regional economies, particularly the Gulf's wealth in oil and natural resources and subsequent dominance of Gulf capital in media ownership, have led to high levels of competition among local, regional, and international media brands (Mellor, 2022). A case in point is the Qatari-based Al Jazeera that has influenced local and pan-Arab politics, in addition to Lebanon's LBC that epitomizes media–political parallelism between Saudi Arabia and Lebanon where political and economic power come from the former and cultural influence from the latter (Kraidy, 2012). Combining investment power with national security interests, countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have exercised their control of the media through sponsorship of local media in their competition with powerful regional media (Mellor, 2022). The overarching power of governments and businesspeople over the media in the Arab world is manifested in early media liberalization efforts across the region, most of which meant control was passed on from political actors to their cronies whom Guaybess (2019) calls "obliged partners of political decision-makers" (p. 63).

To date, few studies have empirically examined journalistic roles in the Arab region. Conceptual research into the functions and objectives of journalists in Arab media has found interpretation (Pintak, 2011) and entertainment to be prominent (Rugh, 2004) and for journalists to play the role of "protectors of the state" (Amin, 2002, p. 128) or "guardians of national identity" (AlSaied, 2021, p. 476) in some countries. Notwithstanding the significance of these accounts, the massive changes the Arab region has recently witnessed in its long-standing political powers, technological advancements, and digital transformations in the media industry (Mellor & Miladi, 2021) warrant a reassessment of media content. To do so, this study adopts a country media systems approach, as opposed to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) classical media system models that apply to various countries, based on the rationale that it is impossible to conceive the Arab region as one homogeneous entity (Mellor, 2023). Such an approach follows more recent research directions that highlight the concept of heterogeneity as integral to understanding journalism around the globe. In their analysis of journalistic roles in 18 countries, Mellado et al. (2017) presented evidence of the hybridization of journalistic cultures that challenges normative media system models. For instance, media in countries that belong to the same media system, such as the liberal democratic corporatist model, behaved differently across nations (Aalberg et al., 2010). Hybridization also applies to single countries, such as China, where a purportedly uniform media system was shown to embrace variations in its press (Wang et al., 2017), and Spain, where the existence of various roles was proof that "a homogeneous model of journalism does not exist" (Humanes & Roses, 2018, p. 1032). Using the country media systems approach only to empirically examine media in the Arab countries and not to endorse or otherwise the use of countries as the unit of analysis in media systems research, we review expectations of journalistic roles in Arab countries whose political and media structures allow a link between systems and roles, a conclusion Mellado et al. (2017) reached in their study on the hybridization of professional roles in the news.

Historically, media freedom in the presidential republic of Egypt has been linked to the diversity of the political parties in the country at any given time (Hamoud, 2023; Najjar, 2004), and is rooted in "the complex, often ambivalent relationship between the press and the state" (Khamis, 2011). Although the media market has always existed as an instrument that serves the elites (Hamoud, 2023), broadcast media, specifically, have been fundamental in disseminating the policies and ideologies of the regimes (Abdelmoez, 2020). Today, Egyptian media operate under a restrained and authoritarian rule regardless of the media ownership structure (Badr, 2021) that allows the coexistence of public, state-controlled media and private, oppositional outlets, alongside a vibrant public sphere made of blogs and social media (Khamis, 2011), a platform that various resistance movements used to express their oppositional views (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). Beside the regime and businesspeople with close ties to the government, the military is a powerful entity that has exercised semi-complete control over the country's broadcast sector and media production companies (Hamoud, 2023). Regarding role performance, interviews with Egyptian journalists after the 2011 revolution found them to play the role of radical opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood and

not the independent and objective roles mostly found in the West (El Issawi & Cammaerts, 2016).

In the parliamentary republic of Lebanon, the diversity of the media system (Rugh, 2004) is a direct reflection of the plurality of the political system that embodies the existing sectarian rule (El-Richani, 2016). Broadcast media, especially, have been long politicized and are closely aligned with political parties (Bou Hamad & Yehya, 2020). Indeed, research has shown broadcast news reflects the sectarian and ideological beliefs of outlet owners (Melki, 2014; Nötzold, 2008), carrying journalists to assume an anti-governmental stance during the 2019 Lebanese protests (El Amine & Kozman, 2023; Farhat & Melki, 2023). Regardless of their political leanings, commercial broadcast outlets play a leading role in the region with their focus on light entertainment (Khazaal, 2020).

The other diverse media system in the region, Kuwait, differs from Lebanon in both its political system and media pluralism (Rugh, 2004). Whereas Lebanon is a republic with a parliament and an unlimited number of political parties, Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy with "a democratic amiri regime" that forbids the formation of political parties (Kuwait Regime, n.d.). As such, the Kuwaiti media scene is diverse in its capacity to allow a wide variety of viewpoints (Alsalem, 2021) and a level of media freedom not common in neighboring Gulf countries (Najjar, 2004), and not as a reflection of the political pluralism as is the case in Lebanon. Regarding journalistic content, Navarro et al.'s (2024) study revealed the prevalence of elite and political sources, which the authors attribute to the close relationship that newspaper owners maintain with the government.

The neighboring Gulf states of Qatar and the UAE, although different in their government styles—Qatar is a constitutional monarchy headed by the Emir and the UAE is a constitutional federation—were both dubbed "loyalist" by Rugh (2004). The fact that media were built to promote their respective nations (AlSaied, 2021; Ayish, 2021; Galal, 2021) automatically links them to the political lines taken up by the royal families regardless of the type of ownership that mixes private with state-owned. The most renowned of these is Qatar's Al Jazeera network that launched in 1996 to boost the country's weight transnationally (Galal, 2021), swiftly becoming an influential entity regionally and internationally (Miladi, 2021). Although an independent institution, the network was established with a fund from the Emir and continues to receive funding from the government (About Us, n.d.), drawing criticism that it represents Qatar's international diplomacy strategy (Miladi, 2021). As for the UAE, the federal government entrusts its media with the role of guardian of national identity, employing them as soft power tools to boost national sentiment (AlSaied, 2021).

Based on the literature on country media systems, news content in Egypt could be expected to play the two sides of the power relations domain—loyalist and watchdog—depending on ownership type and government pressure. Similarly for Lebanon, where the relative freedom that media enjoy in the country, coupled with high media instrumentalization and low professionalism (El-Richani, 2016), could lead journalists to practice the watchdog role as they hold the power elites in check, while acting as loyal facilitators to the parties that own or sponsor them. Kuwait's pluralist media

system could also lend itself to a mix of watchdog and loyalist content. As for Qatar and the UAE, the loyal-facilitator role is expected to be prominent, due to the close relationship between the governing powers and the media. The audience approach could also be present, considering the consumer culture that characterizes these two countries could be reflected in the audience-oriented media.

Platforms and Ownership Patterns in Arab Media

Most countries comprising the Arab region embrace state and commercial media, with a heavy reliance on private ownership and the near absence of public service media. Even early forms of media under the control of national governments and colonial powers were state-owned government newsletters that were later passed on to private entities, rarely embodying the concept of public service (Rugh, 2004). For outlets that did play this role, concerns about media instrumentalization by the government remained rampant (Zaid & Ibahrine, 2021). As such, the designation of the media as private or public is moot in most countries in the Arab region (Mellor, 2022) and does not follow in the same pattern of Western media where private outlets have been more commercially driven (Landerer, 2013) with a tendency to be consumer-oriented (Aalberg et al., 2010) compared with public media that are governed by the public logic and the need to keep the public informed about political issues and current affairs (Brants & Van Praag, 2006).

Today, media in Egypt are owned by the state, political parties, and private individuals and companies (Badr, 2021; Elkilany, 2021). In Lebanon, all media except for one public television station are private, owned by political parties and businesspeople (El-Richani, 2016). As for Kuwait, media ownership is public and private, with state-owned television and radio dominating the broadcast scene, and private, mostly family-owned newspapers leading print media (Alsalem, 2021). Similarly for the other two Gulf states, Qatar and the UAE, the ownership structure combines public and private media with state subsidization. In Qatar, media are generally owned by the state, members of the ruling family, and businesspeople, most of whom maintain close ties with the royal family (Galal, 2021). And in the UAE, state-owned media are the government's voice, while private media have commercial interests (Ayish, 2021). All influential outlets in these countries maintain an online presence, with digital-only media grabbing their share of the online market. Irrespective of media ownership, the broadcast sector in the region is characterized by transnationalism (Kraidy, 2012), propelled by the Qatar's Al Jazeera and embodied by the presence of various other broadcast media, such as MBC and Rotana in Saudi Arabia and Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation in Lebanon, among others. Although transnational in nature, these media corporations are still considered part of their country's local media landscape, at times serving as the government's public diplomacy tool, as in the case of Qatar's Al Jazeera (Galal, 2021; Miladi, 2021).

The importance of television in the Arab region has been reflected in audience analytics where results of a four-wave study between 2013 and 2019 have consistently pointed to the dominance of television, especially as a source of entertainment, but

slightly less so for news (Dennis et al., 2019). At the time when data for this study were collected, Wave V of the Arab Barometer had revealed the prominence of television as a primary source of breaking news in 12 Arab countries, among which are Egypt, Kuwait, and Lebanon (Wee & Li, 2019). However, television viewership and print newspaper readership have been consistently falling throughout the years in Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, and the UAE (Borges-Rey et al., 2022; Dennis et al., 2019), as has trust in the news media to report information fairly and accurately in Lebanon and UAE (Borges-Rey et al., 2022). Similar to the rest of the world, the Arab region is witnessing a shift to online news consumption, with TV sharing its audience with digital news platforms, revealing a decrease in television viewership and an increase in internet use (Dennis et al., 2019). Digital platforms have garnered as much as a third of the public who relies on social media as its primary source of breaking news (Wee & Li, 2019) and general use (Anajjar, 2022).

The above factors imply that the link between political alignment, ownership, platforms, and journalistic performance is not yet clear. Furthermore, media owners' political orientation might be more important than the generally accepted terminologies of media ownership or political parallelism when examining news content (Richter & Kozman, 2021). Combined, these elements indicate role performance is expected to differ among the countries and could be driven by organizational factors beyond the individual country. Although there are expected differences across the Arab countries, there is not enough evidence to pose hypotheses. Therefore, we ask research questions to address the differences among countries and the impact of platform type, political alignment, and ownership on role performance, as follows:

> **RQ1**: What are the main differences in the performance of journalistic roles across Arab countries?
>
> **RQ2**: What are the main differences in the performance of journalistic roles in Arab countries when comparing across news platforms, ownership types, and media political alignment?

Method

This content analysis brings together five countries from the Arab region, which form part of the Second-Wave Journalistic Role Performance project that analyzed media content in 37 countries using a standardized research design (for detailed methodology, go to www.journalisticperformance.org). Data collection in Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates took place simultaneously in 2020 and followed the constructed week approach employed by all participating countries in the project. The sample included two to four national news outlets in four types of platforms: newspapers, radio, television, and online media, chosen by the principal investigators in each country. Given that the structure and format of media systems differ in many ways across countries, lead investigators were instructed to select news outlets that reflect the diversity of the country media systems in terms of language, newsroom size, ownership, political leanings, and audience size and orientation. Preference was

given to national media, though regional and local outlets were included in the sample in countries where they were considered important to the media landscape. The data collected through a stratified systemic strategy of 2 weeks started on January 2, 2020, and ended on December 31, 2020, and resulted in 13,299 news stories from 49 outlets (Table 1). The data were weighted by medium in each country to avoid over- or under-representation of some types of media, leading to an equivalent weight in all four types (26% for each of print, television, and online media, and 22% for radio). The diversity of the outlets is reflected in newsroom size (80.8% small, 15.3% medium, and 3.9% large), ownership (61.5% private, 32.6% state, 4.7% publicly traded, and 1.1% civil society), languages (Arabic and English), political leanings, and audience size.

Here, it is important to acknowledge that the year of data collection coincided with spread of the coronavirus starting the third month of sampling. The pandemic disrupted daily life with total lockdowns that made it difficult for journalists to cover their beats, ultimately influencing the way they performed their roles. Research about journalistic role performance during COVID-19 has revealed mixed results, with the global JRP dataset revealing journalists were more likely to perform service and civic roles than watchdog and infotainment roles across 37 countries (Hallin et al., 2023). In the United Kingdom, journalists tended to be service and civic-oriented, and interventionist, while being both skeptical watchdogs to the government and cooperating in spreading health compliance messages (Zhao et al., 2023). Using framing theory, a study in South Africa revealed its print media content had an alarmist nature with sensationalism and negative undertones and lack of a service or civic orientation (Wasserman et al., 2021), while a comparative analysis of six countries in five continents indicated the media's propensity to frame the pandemic in terms of loss, consequences, or collective action (Bhatti et al., 2022). These studies, therefore, point to the distinctive behavior journalists adopted during health crises.

Sample Unit and Unit of Analysis

The sampling unit was the most watched newscast within each selected television channel, the most listened-to news program within each selected radio channel, the full issue of the selected newspapers for print media, and the entire homepage of the selected news websites including the respective links for online news media. Considering website news are dynamic and change constantly, we captured the homepages of the websites at two fixed points during the sampled days: once at 11:00 a.m. and once at 11:00 p.m. This 12-hr gap between the two captures would most likely provide the greatest amount of content variability.

The unit of analysis was the single news story, defined as a set of contiguous verbal and, if applicable, audio and visual elements that refer to the same event/issue/person. All news topics were analyzed, excluding reviews, op-eds, and wire stories. Also excluded was content that was not produced by the staff of the respective newsrooms—wire service stories, for example, or articles by non-journalists included on news sites; however, content created by freelance journalists was coded.

Table 1. News Stories and Outlets by Country.

Outlet	Frequency	%
Egypt		
El oula	352	2.6
CBC News Egypt	519	3.9
Radio 90 90	355	2.7
El bernag el am	516	3.9
Al-Ahram	326	2.4
Al-masry Elyoum	218	1.6
Alyoum Alsabee	180	1.4
Al-Wafd	146	1.1
Mada Masr	230	1.7
Masrawy	421	3.2
Daily News Egypt	220	1.7
Kuwait		
Kuwait TV	243	1.8
Alrai TV	224	1.7
Kuwait Radio	467	3.5
Al Qabas	166	1.2
Al-Anba	136	1
Kuwait Times	56	0.4
Alaan	139	1
alraimedia.com	328	2.5
Kuwait Arab Times	109	0.8
Lebanon		
Al-Manar TV	139	1
LBCI	132	1
MTV Lebanon	204	1.5
Al-Jadeed	181	1.4
OTV	103	0.8
NBN	157	1.2
Sawt Lubnan (Voice of Lebanon)	658	5
Sawt Lubnan Al-Hurr (Radio Liban Libre)	258	1.9
An-Nahar	533	4
Al-Akhbar	383	2.9
Lebanon Files	231	1.7
El Nashra	231	1.7
Lebanon Debate	231	1.7
LBC Online	224	1.7
Qatar		
Aljazeera English	243	1.8
Aljazeera Arabic	277	2.1
The Gulf Times	258	1.9

Table 1. (continued)

Outlet	Frequency	%
Al-Sharq	262	2
ILoveQatar	260	2
Qatarliving	260	2
United Arab Emirates		
Dubai TV	393	3
Abu Dhabi TV	289	2.2
Sharjah Radio	681	5.1
Al Bayan	174	1.3
Al Itihad	172	1.3
Al Khalij	336	2.5
Barq Al Emarat	246	1.8
Wam	206	1.6
Al Ain	229	1.7
Total	13,299	100

Table 2. Global Intercoder Reliability Across Roles in Arab Countries.

Country/role	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal	Service	Infotainment	Civic	M
Egypt	.76	.70	.79	.73	.71	.76	.74
Kuwait	.72	.73	.78	.71	.69	.70	.72
Lebanon	.92	.90	.89	.95	.91	.89	.91
Qatar	.69	.74	.81	.70	.70	.74	.73
UAE	.77	.75	.77	.70	.74	.74	.75

Coding Protocol

Intercoder Reliability. A total of 15 native speakers of Arabic and fluent speakers of English coded the content in each country separately. The project followed a three-step strategy to test for intercoder reliability among and within countries. First, a pre-test among principal investigators across countries was conducted to ensure they had a shared understanding of the codebook. Second, national teams ran pre-tests on their teams that featured articles not included in the actual sample. Coders were retrained as many times as necessary to ensure that acceptable intercoder reliability coefficients were achieved. Finally, a post-test was conducted within each country on 100 news articles to ensure the reliability of the coders in the actual coding process. Global inter-coder reliability among Arab countries was .77 (Krippendorff's alpha), and ranged from .70 to .95 for journalistic roles, and from .72 to .91 across countries (Table 2).

Variables. The main variables of interest for this study were the six journalistic roles— loyal-facilitator, watchdog, interventionist, service, civic, and infotainment—that

were conceptualized and operationalized in the news following the framework of Mellado and colleagues (Mellado, 2021; Mellado & van Dalen, 2017). Each role was measured through several indicators (Table 3) that were coded for their absence/presence in each story. Afterward, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were used to measure the scale consistency of each role. Keeping only the indicators that showed a sufficient fit in the CFA, we then computed each role by averaging its indicators, resulting in a continuous variable from 0 to 1, where higher values meant more of that role. For descriptive purposes, we calculated raw scores (total points divided by the total items for each role), meanwhile, we used factor scores to test for differences in the performance of the roles. In addition to the six role performances, media political alignment and media ownership were also measured at the organizational level within each country. Ownership options comprised state, private, civic society, and publicly traded types. Political alignment was a yes or no question that indicated whether the outlet had a political leaning.

Results

For the first research question that explored differences in role performance among the five countries (Table 4), we conducted six analyses of variance tests (ANOVAs) where each role was the dependent variable and the country was the independent variable. Descriptive figures from each country show that in Egypt, the loyal-facilitator role had the highest level in the news, followed by the service and interventionist roles, ahead of infotainment, civic, and watchdog roles. In Kuwait, the roles were closer in levels, led by interventionism, service, infotainment, loyal, civic, and watchdog. In contrast, the roles were more spread out in Lebanon where interventionism was by far the most dominant role, followed at a distance by watchdog, infotainment, and civic, then loyal and service. Similarly in Qatar, interventionism was much more common than service and infotainment, with loyal, watchdog, and civic role occupying the lower ends. Finally in the UAE, loyalism and interventionism led the other roles, and were followed by service and infotainment, and further down the list by the civic and watchdog roles. The intracountry variations for each role (Table 5) reveal that Qatar's media outlet seemed to vary the most for all roles, especially in loyal, watchdog, and infotainment roles. The complete opposite was Lebanon where little variance in the media appeared. UAE media, as well, varied only slightly, as did Kuwaiti outlets, except for interventionism. As for Egypt, high variance was recorded only in the service, interventionist, and loyal roles.

The ANOVAs that tested RQ1 revealed that the two roles that measured power relations recorded opposing results. The loyalist role, which had the highest effect size among all roles, $F(4, 13,293) = 566.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .146$, showed the UAE to lead with Qatar further away in the middle and Lebanon on the opposite end. The watchdog role, however, was led by Qatar, followed closely by Lebanon and Kuwait, $F(4, 13,293) = 56.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .017$, with the UAE occupying the end of the spectrum, along with Egypt. The effect size, however, was very small.

Table 3. Journalistic Role Performance Across Countries, Mean Scores (Standard Deviations in Parenthesis) and Role Indicators (%).

Role/ Country	Egypt	Kuwait	Lebanon	Qatar	UAE	TOTAL	F	η^2
Interventionist	.0786 (.1613)	.0900 (.1564)	.0964 (.1797)	.2029 (.2307)	.1774 (.1744)	.1199 (.1839)	232.308***	.065
Journalist's point of view	6.5%	4.3%	10.7%	13.4%	10.4%	9%		
Interpretation	16.6%	22.6%	10.6%	28.7%	16.3%	17.2%		
Call to action	1.8%	2.4%	1.3%	3.8%	3.6%	2.3%		
Qualifying adjectives	13.7%	14.1%	22.3%	41.8%	56.5%	28.2%		
First person	0.7%	1.7%	3.2%	13.7%	1.9%	3.3%		
Watchdog	.0100 (.0567)	.0333 (.0943)	.0333 (.0713)	.0349 (.1001)	.0191 (.0876)	.0245 (.0796)	56.606***	.017
Information on judicial processes	1.9%	8.1%	1.8%	4.3%	3.2%	3.3%		
Questioning by journalist	0.4%	1.0%	4.3%	2.1%	1.5%	2.0%		
Questioning by others	1.9%	5.0%	4.4%	4.4%	3.4%	3.6%		
Criticism by journalist	0.4%	1.3%	4.3%	2.2%	0.4%	1.8%		
Criticism by others	2.0%	5.4%	11.7%	12.6%	3.9%	6.8%		
Uncovering by journalist	0.4%	1.1%	1.0%	0.4%	0.6%	0.7%		
Uncovering by others	1.7%	5.5%	1.2%	2.9%	3.6%	2.6%		
Reporting on external investigation	0.2%	1.4%	1.3%	2.5%	0.5%	1.0%		
Investigative reporting	0.1%	1.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%		
Loyal	.1181 (.2252)	.0544 (.1189)	.0090 (.0445)	.0642 (.1318)	.1899 (.1908)	.0875 (.1721)	566.347***	.146
Defense/support activities	15.2%	3.1%	1.4%	17.7%	27.5%	12.5%		
Defense/support policies	15.2%	1.5%	0.1%	6.1%	16.8%	8.4%		
Positive image of the elite	20.7%	19.0%	4.1%	13.2%	41.2%	19.2%		
Progress/success	14.6%	3.5%	0.2%	2.7%	26.9%	10.2%		
Comparison to other countries	3.2%	2.1%	0.4%	3.2%	5.4%	2.8%		
National triumphs	6.2%	2.7%	0.5%	2.2%	7.2%	3.9%		
Promotion of the country	15.8%	8.5%	0.2%	3.0%	21.7%	10.2%		
Patriotism	3.5%	3.0%	0.2%	3.3%	5.1%	2.8%		
Service	.0954 (.2023)	.0781 (.1597)	.0045 (.0359)	.0909 (.1591)	.1179 (.2349)	.0720 (.1755)	216.022***	.061
Impact on everyday life	17.9%	13.1%	1.6%	11.8%	12.4%	10.9%		
Tips and advice (grievances)	4.5%	5.0%	0.1%	2.0%	6.5%	3.5%		

Table 3. (continued)

Role/ Country	Egypt	Kuwait	Lebanon	Qatar	UAE	TOTAL	*F*	η^2
Tips and advice (individual risks)	7.8%	3.9%	0.2%	14.4%	11.3%	6.6%		
Consumer information	11.3%	14.4%	0.2%	13.1%	16.6%	10.0%		
Consumer advice	6.2%	2.7%	0.1%	4.1%	12.3%	5.0%		
Infotainment	.0556 (.1642)	.0684 (.1398)	.0271 (.0805)	.0933 (.1712)	.1034 (.2114)	.0638 (.1581)	111.906***	.033
Personalization	7.3%	9.0%	1.5%	12.1%	13.5%	7.8%		
Private life	2.4%	1.0%	1.7%	2.7%	2.5%	2.1%		
Sensationalism	8.1%	8.8%	7.1%	13.3%	13.3%	9.6%		
Emotions	6.1%	10.6%	2.5%	13.3%	15.6%	8.5%		
Morbidity	3.8%	4.8%	0.8%	5.3%	6.9%	3.9%		
Civic	.0254 (.0905)	.0443 (.0921)	.0221 (.0617)	.0237 (.0844)	.0415 (.0931)	.0302 (.0841)	39.627***	.012
Citizen reactions	3.2%	4.9%	2.8%	7.3%	4.8%	4.1%		
Citizen demand	2.4%	2.9%	3.2%	4.1%	1.8%	2.8%		
Credibility of citizens	1.4%	1.9%	0.1%	1.2%	0.8%	1.0%		
Education on duties/rights	2.4%	5.3%	0.8%	1.3%	10.1%	3.8%		
Local impact	5.1%	10.4%	5.2%	2.8%	7.8%	6.1%		
Social community impact	5.4%	8.4%	3.5%	1.6%	7.3%	5.3%		
Citizen questions	0.3%	0.9%	0.1%	1.0%	1.1%	0.6%		
Information on citizen activities	1.6%	3.6%	3.9%	1.6%	2.6%	2.7%		
Support of citizen movements	1.0%	1.6%	0.2%	0.4%	1.1%	0.8%		

Note. df = 4, 13,294, *p* < .001. The percentages refer to the presence of the indicator in the news story.

Table 4. Means of Journalistic Roles Performance Across Countries (Standard Deviations in Parenthesis).

Role/ Country	Egypt	Kuwait	Lebanon	Qatar	UAE	TOTAL	F	η^2
Interventionist	.0786 (.1613)	.0900 (.1564)	.0964 (.1797)	.2029 (.2307)	.1774 (.1744)	.1199 (.1839)	232.308***	.065
Watchdog	.0100 (.0567)	.0333 (.0943)	.0333 (.0713)	.0349 (.1001)	.0191 (.0876)	.0245 (.0796)	56.606***	.017
Loyal	.1181 (.2252)	.0544 (.1189)	.0090 (.0445)	.0642 (.1318)	.1899 (.1908)	.0875 (.1721)	566.347***	.146
Service	.0954 (.2023)	.0781 (.1597)	.0045 (.0359)	.0909 (.1591)	.1179 (.2349)	.0720 (.1755)	216.022***	.061
Infotainment	.0556 (.1642)	.0684 (.1398)	.0271 (.0805)	.0933 (.1712)	.1034 (.2114)	.0638 (.1581)	111.906***	.033
Civic	.0254 (.0905)	.0443 (.0921)	.0221 (.0617)	.0237 (.0844)	.0415 (.0931)	.0302 (.0841)	39.627***	.012

Note. $df = 4, 13{,}294, p < .001$.

Table 5. Intracountry Variation on Role Performance Across Outlets.

Country/role	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal	Service	Infotainment	Civic	*M*
Egypt	17.5	3.2	14.8	18.2	9.4	13.2	12.7
Kuwait	12.8	7.5	2.5	7	7	2.7	6.5
Lebanon	6.4	2.7	0.7	0.8	3.1	1.9	2.6
Qatar	4.4	21.1	33.1	23.6	15	14.2	18.5
UAE	7.7	6.3	5.9	1.3	3.8	1.6	4.4

Note. Eta-squared values are reported as percentages.

Regarding the audience approach domain, UAE news was more prone to service than any other country in the region alongside Egypt, while Lebanon was the least to include service, $F(4, 13,293) = 216.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .061$. The UAE also leads in infotainment with Qatar close by and Lebanon on the opposite end, $F(4, 13,293) = 111.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .033$, but took second place, albeit marginally, in the civic role that Kuwait lead. Similar to other roles, Lebanon was the last to display the civic role, $F (4, 13,293) = 39.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .012$, although again, the effect size is not meaningful. Finally, the role that measured the presence of journalistic voice in the news revealed Qatar to have the highest levels of interventionism, followed by the UAE, while Egypt was the lowest in this role, $F (4, 13,293) = 232.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .065$.

To answer the second research question, which asked about the impact of organizational logics on journalistic role performance, beyond the impact of the country, we conducted a hierarchical multiple linear regression on each of the six roles separately (Table 6). For each role, country was entered in the first block, media type in the second block, and the organizational factors of media–political alignment and media ownership in the third block.

Starting with the loyal-facilitator role, although all three models were significant, with the third model explaining the biggest variance in this role (16.5%), the differences among the three models were minimal. Regardless, all individual variables in all three models were significant, except for private and civic society ownership. This means country differences remain important, as do media platforms, when we add media political alignment and ownership types to the equation. The UAE showed the highest likelihood to include loyal content in its coverage (unstandardized $B = .071$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$), whereas Lebanon, Qatar, and Kuwait, respectively, were less likely to do so compared to Egypt. No statistical difference between ownership types suggests the extent to which media stories include the loyal-facilitator role is similar across these media. As for politically aligned media, they were more inclined to show their loyal tendencies ($B = .025$, $SE = .006$, $p < .001$).

Also significant were differences in the performance of the watchdog role, with the most pronounced change appearing in the third block that explained 3.4% ($p < .001$) of the variation in the role, compared to the second block ($R^2 = .019$, $p < .001$). All variables were significant in all three models, except for print media. Compared to

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Each of the Six Journalistic Roles.

Role	Variables	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)
Interventionist	Country			
	Kuwait	.011 (.005)*	.011 (.005)*	.007 (.006)
	Lebanon	.018 (.004)***	.018 (.004)***	.054 (.007)***
	Qatar	.124 (.005)***	.113 (.005)***	.156 (.008)***
	UAE	.099 (.005)***	.099 (.005)***	.106 (.005)***
	Medium			
	Online		.041 (.004)***	.025 (.005)***
	Print		.042 (.004)***	.032 (.005)***
	Radio		−.016 (.004)***	−.016 (.004)***
	Political alignment			−.046 (.007)***
	Ownership			
	Publicly traded			.098 (.012)***
	Private ownership			.015 (.005)**
	Civic society			.107 (.017)***
	Adjusted R^2	.065	.083	.089
	F	232.319***	173.344***	118.758***
Watchdog	Country			
	Kuwait	.023 (.002)***	.023 (.002)***	.035 (.003)***
	Lebanon	.023 (.002)***	.023 (.002)***	.056 (.003)***
	Qatar	.025 (.002)***	.022 (.002)***	.059 (.004)***
	UAE	.009 (.002)***	.009 (.002)***	.013 (.002)***
	Medium			
	Online		−.003 (.002)	−.013 (.002)***
	Print		.001 (.002)	−.001 (.002)
	Radio		−.011 (.002)***	−.011 (.002)***
	Political alignment			−.043 (.003)***
	Ownership			.013 (.002)***
	Publicly traded			.036 (.005)***
	Private ownership			.013 (.002)***
	Civic society			.044 (.008)***
	Adjusted R^2	.016	.019	.034
	F	56.608***	13.154***	52.502***
Loyal	Country			
	Kuwait	−.064 (.005)***	−.064 (.005)***	−.048 (.005)***
	Lebanon	−.109 (.004)***	−.109 (.004)***	−.127 (.006)***
	Qatar	−.054 (.005)***	−.064 (.005)***	−.085 (.007)***
	UAE	.072 (.004)***	.072 (.004)***	.071 (.004)***
	Medium			
	Online		.029 (.004)***	.040 (.004)***
	Print		.037 (.004)***	.042 (.004)***
	Radio		−.019 (.004)***	−.019 (.004)***
	Political alignment			.025 (.006)***
	Ownership			
	Publicly traded			−.084 (.011)***
	Private ownership			−.006 (.004)
	Civic society			.000 (.016)
	Adjusted R^2	.145	.161	.165
	F	566.375***	83.544***	18.852***

Table 6. (continued)

Role	Variables	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)
Service	Country			
	Kuwait	−.017 (.005)***	−.017 (.005)***	−.012 (.006)
	Lebanon	−.091 (.004)***	−.091 (.004)***	−.135 (.007)***
	Qatar	−.004 (.005)	−.013 (.005)	−.047 (.008)***
	UAE	.023 (.004)***	.023 (.004)***	.033 (.005)***
	Medium			
	Online		.076 (.004)***	.073 (.005)***
	Print		.030 (.004)***	.021 (.004)***
	Radio		.002 (.004)	.003 (.004)
	Political alignment			.045 (.006)***
	Ownership			
	Publicly traded			−.043 (.011)***
	Private ownership			.022 (.005)***
	Civic society			.049 (.016)
	Adjusted R^2	.061	.091	.100
	F	216.033***	149.110***	35.604***
Infotainment	Country			
	Kuwait	.013 (.004)**	.013 (.004)**	.009 (.005)
	Lebanon	−.029 (.004)***	−.029 (.004)***	.004 (.006)
	Qatar	.038 (.005)***	.028 (.005)***	.071 (.007)***
	UAE	.048 (.004)***	.048 (.004)***	.058 (.004)***
	Medium			
	Online		.035 (.004)***	.014 (.004)**
	Print		.010 (.004)*	−.002 (.004)
	Radio		−.023 (.004)***	−.022 (.004)***
	Political alignment			−.047 (.006)***
	Ownership			
	Publicly traded			.105 (.010)***
	Private ownership			.026 (.004)***
	Civic society			.090 (.015)***
	Adjusted R^2	.032	.048	.056
	F	111.911***	75.589***	28.345***
Civic	Country			
	Kuwait	.019 (.002)***	.019 (.002)***	.026 (.003)***
	Lebanon	−.003 (.002)	−.003 (.002)	.008 (.003)*
	Qatar	−.002 (.003)	−.002 (.003)	.010 (.004)**
	UAE	.016 (.002)***	.016 (.002)***	.018 (.002)***
	Medium			
	Online		.003 (.002)	.000 (.002)
	Print		.000 (.002)	.000 (.002)
	Radio		−.002 (.002)	−.002 (.002)
	Political alignment			−.015 (.003)***
	Ownership			
	Publicly traded			.004 (.006)
	Private ownership			.005 (.002)*
	Civic society			.010 (.008)
	Adjusted R^2	.011	.012	.014
	F	39.629***	1.520	8.231***

Note. Baseline categories: Egypt (country); TV (medium); and state-owned (ownership).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Egypt, all countries were more likely to include the watchdog function in their news, with the slimmest difference showing in UAE ($B = .013$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$) and the widest one in Qatar ($B = .059$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$). As for platforms, both radio ($B = -.011$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$) and online media ($B = -.013$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$) were less likely than television to act as watchdogs. Politically aligned media also exhibited lower watchdog role ($B = -.043$, $SE = .003$, $p < .001$), as did state media.

The regression model was also significant for the interventionist role, $F(11, 13,287) = 118.758$, $p < .001$. Beyond country and platform differences, the stories also varied based on media alignment and ownership, which explained the largest difference in the data, accounting for 8.9% of the variance in the role ($p < .001$). All variables were significant in the three models, except for Kuwait whose difference disappeared in the third model. The media with a political alignment were less likely to be interventionist in their coverage ($B = -.046$, $SE = .007$, $p < .001$). Another point of interest for this study is the significant difference state-owned media showed compared with private ownership ($B = .015$, $SE = .005$, $p < .005$), publicly trade media ($B = .098$, $SE = .012$, $p < .001$), and civic society media ($B = .107$, $SE = .017$, $p < .001$), where state media were less likely to include intervention in their stories.

The service role as well showed significant differences among countries, platforms, and ownership type. With all models being significant, the third model explained only slightly more than the platform/country model (10%, $p < .001$). Qatar was the only country not to differ from Egypt in this role. However, the picture changed when platforms, and ownership and alignment were added. In the third model, radio lost its significance compared with television, while print ($B = .021$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$) and online media ($B = .073$, $SE = .005$, $p < .001$) showed more service orientation. Interestingly, in all five countries, state media were less likely to include the service role, with the exception of publicly traded media that went the opposite way ($B = -.043$, $SE = .011$, $p < .001$), that is, were less likely than state media to be service-oriented. Politically aligned media, as well, included more of this role than the rest.

Regarding infotainment, media political alignment and ownership were significant predictors of this role, beyond the effect of country and platform ($R^2 = .056$, $p < .001$). The effect of country weakened in the third block, but remained significant for Qatar ($B = .071$, $SE = .007$, $p < .001$) and the UAE ($B = .058$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$) that were more likely than Egypt to include infotainment in their news. Platforms as well remained significant for all but print media. Although online media showed more infotainment ($B = .014$, $SE = .004$, $p < .002$), radio showed less ($B = -.022$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$). Politically aligned media were less likely than non-political ones to include this role in their news ($B = -.047$, $SE = .006$, $p < .001$), as were state media compared with the other types of ownership.

The only role among the six not to be consistent was the civic role, where platform type did not make any contributions. The final model, however, significantly explained 1.4% of the variance ($p < .001$), compared with the 1.1% of country alone ($p < .001$). Considering the small effect size of the country variable, the real differences could be attributed to political alignment and ownership types, and not so much countries. Whereas all four countries were more likely to show the civic role

compared with Egypt, platforms remained non-significant in the third model. Also non-significant were differences between state media, civic society, and publicly traded media. This means private media were the only ones that significantly showed civic duties compared with state media ($B = .005$, $SE = .002$, $p < .02$). Politically aligned media ($B = −.015$, $SE = .003$, $p < .001$), however, were less likely to be civic than non-political ones.

Discussion

This study took a media systems approach to understand the journalistic roles performed in the news media of five Arab countries. Generally speaking, the combined effect of country, platforms, media ownership, and political alignment predicted the presence of all six roles, suggesting these elements are highly intertwined and need to be understood together instead of separately. Although the analysis provides evidence of the heterogeneity of the Arab region, the small effect sizes point to some levels of homogeneity, especially considering large variations in countries were most likely due to the skewing effect of select outlets, such as Al Jazeera [1] (for intracountry variations, see Table 5).

Assessing power relations in the region confirmed not all Arab media are mouthpieces of their governments. Among all six roles, the loyal-facilitator role exhibited the biggest variation across the countries with little to no effect for ownership types. Put differently, regardless of who owns the media, loyalism in the region differs based on country, platform type, and the media's political alignment. Although Emirati media scored highest in loyalist content, Qatar sat far away behind Egypt, with variances in platforms and political alignment. This role was also more visible in newspapers and least in radio across the region, and more present in politically aligned media. The opposite appeared in the watchdog role that Qatar led. Qatari media that have been historically considered to operate under an "oppressive legislative arsenal and draconian system of censorship" (Qatar, n.d.) tended to be more critical and questioning than the two historically semi-free countries, Lebanon and Kuwait. The UAE, however, performed its non-threatening roles as outlined in literature and was the least to include indicators of the watchdog function of the media. These differences between two seemingly similar neighbors say much about the nuances of media systems and how they could differ on the country level, even when the political systems, infrastructure, economy, and other indicators deemed important criteria for measuring media systems point to the same direction.

Beyond country differences, the watchdog role appeared least in state media and politically aligned media, and most in television compared to online media and radio. The intracountry variations that are large in Qatar and mostly small in the other countries in the loyal and watchdog roles (Table 5) are due to the presence of Al Jazeera that seems to be in a league of its own. Its investigative journalism that is most often targeted at entities outside the country (Hachten & Scotton, 2016), separated it from all media in the sample. In Egypt, the findings that showed local media to be loyalist more than most other countries and the opposite for watchdog attitudes can be explained by

the repressive media environment that has controlled freedom under President El-Sisi. Holding the government in check could be subject to criminal codes and punishment, an example of which is the 2018 Cybercrime Law (Badr, 2021), and the 2019 control of the media by intelligence services, which stifled dissenting voices through a climate of fear, social stigmatization, and oftentimes, arrests and detention (Egypt, n.d.).

The country media systems approach also explains why Lebanon was the least to show media loyalty to the nation. Given the pluralism of the political parties that are closely linked to the country's 18 officially recognized religious sects, the media reflect this power-sharing political system, oftentimes mirroring the political ideology of their owners (El-Richani, 2016). Fittingly, there will always exist opposition-led dissenting media that do not subscribe to the government's national policies. Although the homogeneous scene we found in our sample might seem to contradict the country's renowned political parallelism, this is most likely due to the implicit ways the media exercise their bias, often through their choice of sources or framing of the story, which our variables did not account for. The other diverse media system in the region, Kuwait, also mirrored its non-conformist stance, and showed more watchdog tendencies than loyalist ones consistently across its media.

Although media systems most accurately related to national media's power relations roles, they could not offer a direct explanation to the variation in interventionism across the sample, especially considering the small effect size that suggests the significance among countries is most probably due to the large sample. In general, interventionism, which measures journalistic voice, came in the form of news interpretation and use of adjectives, with the Gulf states of Qatar and the UAE leading the pack and Egypt falling in the last spot. Accounting for organizational factors, state-owned and politically aligned media were less likely to include interventionism, whereas newspapers were the most likely to feature it ahead of online sites, television, and radio.

Stepping away from political roles, the audience approach takes into account how the media behave with respect to their audiences and whether they see them as consumers (service role), spectators (infotainment role), or citizens (civic role). In infotainment, countries—with the exception of Qatar and UAE—did not matter when ownership and alignment entered the equation. That is, Egyptian, Kuwaiti, and Lebanese media were similar in their approach to infotainment but differed according to who owns them and whether they have any political affiliations. The opposite happened in the civic role, where the countries mattered only when political alignment played a role, suggesting private and non-politically aligned media play a civic role more so in Kuwait and the UAE than in Lebanon and Egypt.

Regarding political economy patterns in audience-related roles, state media were big on infotainment with emotions and sensationalism and low on service. Although the lack of service contradicts with the global JRP dataset results that showed service and civic roles to be high across the 37 countries (Hallin et al., 2023), the focus on infotainment could be due to the effect of COVID-19. As one of the deadliest pandemics in recent history, it seems to have altered journalists' behaviors carrying them to use emotive language and sensationalize the news, as a study in South Africa has shown (Wasserman et al., 2021). Interestingly, state media did not differ from civic

society and publicly traded media in the civic role. Only private media showed significantly more civic orientation. Politically aligned media, as well, were less likely to be civic or entertaining but more likely to be service-oriented. These findings are in contrast with what constitutes media logic in Western contexts and could be partly attributed to the distinction of private versus public in most parts of the world, a dichotomy that does not apply to the Arab region (Mellor, 2022). Considering private commercial media are linked to consumerism (Aalberg et al., 2010), one can expect stable nations with consumer societies, such as the Gulf states, to afford the luxury of catering to their audiences' needs, as opposed to conflict-ridden countries, such as Lebanon, that have more pressing matters to attend to, and thus forego attracting audiences. When the country variable mattered in audience roles, we saw a clear distinction between UAE and Qatar, on one hand, and the rest, on the other. The two countries form an integral part of a Gulf region that, in recent decades, has witnessed a massive growth in its GDP (Understanding the Gulf Consumer, n.d.), which became associated with hyper consumerism. Both UAE and Qatar provided significant space for service and infotainment, two of the roles that treat audiences as consumers versus citizens, sometimes using emotional and sensational language to personalize the news. Personalization is one of many strategies that result from the commercialization of media, specifically the "need for compelling, attention-grabbing, and dramatic stories" to compete with other media for attention from audiences (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009, p. 212). Although Kuwait differs quite largely from any system in our sample, especially from its neighbors in the Gulf, it did share with them a focus on infotainment through a tendency to personalize the news and color it with emotions and sensationalism.

Regarding platforms, the commercialization of the media could explain why digital news sites in the current study led other media in their focus on consumers, showing the highest levels of infotainment and service. Although commercial television was the medium traditionally linked to infotainment in the West (Brants, 1998; Thussu, 2010), in our sample, it took second place in infotainment after digital media and did not differ from newspapers in this role. The focus of news sites on infotainment in our study, however, is not surprising given how digital media technologies influence consumer culture due to the "commercial and consumerist manifestations" of new media (MacAllister, 2011, p. 149).

Conclusion

With as many differences as there are similarities, journalism in the Arab region is not as homogeneous as sometimes pitted to be. When compared with the rest of the world, the countries in this region could indeed look similar. The variations that exist among the countries, however, provide sufficient evidence that warns against broad generalizations and warrants a more nuanced theorization of this part of the world. This study has revealed the ways journalists exercise their roles are a mixture of various factors that include country of origin, platform types, ownership, and political alignment. Taken together, the results point to the overarching power of the political system in a country that is manifested in media ownership, media political alignment, and

country's traditions. In other words, where the media are located combine with the type of the freedoms or censorship imposed by a country's political and legal systems to exert the biggest influence on the media. This analysis was especially true for power relations, where diverse media systems in Lebanon and Kuwait were associated with less loyalism and more watchdog attitudes, whereas news in historically known loyalist systems remained loyal in the UAE and Egypt, but in Qatar, it showed the highest tendency to play the watchdog role. Countries' wealth and internal stability were also indirectly related to their focus on audiences, mostly as consumers, as in UAE and Qatar, and sometimes as members of a civic public, as in Kuwait. In contrast, conflict and political instability, coupled with political parallelism and media instrumentalization, were factors that could explain how Egypt and Lebanon, two countries with diverging media systems, were similar in their low interest to serve their audiences.

A clear pattern emerged in platforms, where the role traditionally ascribed to television as a worldwide leader in infotainment (Thussu, 2010) did not hold up in our sample. On the contrary, television differentiated itself by its watchdog role, while online media led in infotainment. Another obvious pattern appeared in political alignment, where media that are aligned with political groups did not engage in the watchdog or civic roles voice but were prone to show loyalist and service attitudes toward the government and their audiences. This measure could be considered a better predictor of journalistic performance in the Arab region than the traditional private versus public designation, where private means a market-driven, commercial enterprise and public means state-subsidized or people-funded media that prioritize the public good over profit-making (Richter & Kozman, 2021). Considering most private media in the region are owned by businesspeople with close ties to those in power, either through nepotism—as in Lebanon and Egypt—or true loyalty to the rulers—as in UAE and Qatar, we saw private media diverge less from state or other media in their journalistic role performance.

Closely related to the politicization of the media is the profit-driven logic that blurs the lines between the purported aims of private versus state-owned media. Our findings align with Landerer's (2013) concept of market logic as a framework for the mediatization of politics, where the media are driven by "self-interested goals" (p. 250), either as purely commercial media or through their instrumentalization by political actors who scramble to push forth their political gains.

Regarding limitations, the study analyzed only five countries, therefore generalizing the results to the entire Arab region is not possible. What is important, however, is the outcome on which this study focused, which is understanding journalistic roles in relation to country media systems. Considering research on journalistic cultures is predominantly Western in nature, this study is valuable in its ability to provide a comparative analysis of Arab media from three different subregions, to underline the importance of understanding the region as a heterogenous area. Still, it is important to acknowledge our country-based approach might not have yielded as clearcut results as perhaps needed, indicating the necessity to better theorize Arab media systems, and whether the use of the country as a unit of analysis is the best way to analyze these media. Another limitation was the sampling year that was disrupted by the coronavirus

pandemic, suggesting the results of this study might not be representative of more normal times. Finally, the choice of media outlets was made by each country's research team, following the guidelines of the central team of the JRP project. This approach might have excluded some media, including blogs and social media, that might have added valuable insight to this study.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1.   Role performance figures in Al Jazeera's English versions differed significantly from Al Jazeera Arabic and the other four outlets in Qatar, as all six ANOVAs and post hoc showed. The watchdog ($M = .126$, $SD = .186$), interventionist ($M = .291$, $SD = .275$), infotainment ($M = .232$, $SD = .244$), and civic roles ($M = .099$, $SD = .166$) in AJ-E were strikingly higher than the country average excluding AJ-E and AJ-A ($M_{WD} = .013$; $M_{INT} = .191$; $M_{INF} = .071$; $M_{CVC} = .007$), while the loyal ($M = .002$, $SD = .036$) and service roles ($M = .008$, $SD = .052$) were lower ($M_{LYL} = .095$; $M_{SRV} = .128$). As for AJ-A, the watchdog role was higher than the country, loyal and service roles were lower, and interventionism, infotainment, and civic roles did not differ significantly from the country averages. When comparing it to AJ-E, there was no significant difference in loyal and service roles, while remaining four roles were lower.

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